

ART

SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS

EXPLORATIONS

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.EXPLORATIONS.

ART

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April, 1970

EXPLORATIONS INTRODUCTION

Leah B. Sherman
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The activities documented in this publication grow out of the philosophy behind art education in the Department of Fine Arts at Sir George Williams University. We are committed to a continuous extension of the possibilities for aesthetic and sensory development.

The experiences that follow were stimulating to us. Because we feel that it is the responsibility of the university to set up channels of communication with the community, we are sharing them with art educators at all levels. We hope to encourage others in their explorations of new ways of teaching art; and of awakening children, adolescents and adults to the changing dimensions of art today. Endless opportunities present themselves.

These are but a few.

The first three projects were carried out during the 1968-69 session of the Art Education Laboratory. This laboratory, directed by Peter London, is part of the Art Education Programme of the Department of Fine Arts.

The fourth and fifth experiments occurred during the summer of 1968 at the National Gallery of Canada. They were part of a children's workshop under the supervision of Stanley Horner, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, Sir George Williams University. Chantal Dupont and Astrid Bhreur, graduate students in Art Education of this university, assisted in the workshop.

ART EDUCATION LABORATORY

Assistant Professor Peter London
Director, Art Education Laboratory
Department of Fine Arts
Sir George Williams University.

Each child has an inquisitiveness, an ability to reach out, search, interpret and eventually discover himself and his world. And there seems to be a certain organization of each such experience that John Dewey termed the aesthetic nature of experience. Societal pressures soon, however, stifle this open and spirited quality in all but the hardiest individuals.

The child's ability to be creative and sensitive presupposes his openness to the world and a sense of individual worth. The children's art classes at Sir George Williams University intend to elicit and nurture that part of the child that is still searching, vital and alive to experience and open to personal adventure.

Rather than allow the media or the history of art to determine the style and content of the child's art, we seek to help him clarify what it is he needs to say about his world and to guide him to compose that expression in significant form.

The child's greatest contribution to the world is, in the end, himself. The Art Education Laboratory is intended to reveal that authentic self and to allow it to grow, "to include multitudes".

The three projects presented here exhibit the experimental nature of the school, offering unlimited scope for open-ended research into the changing philosophy and practise of art education.

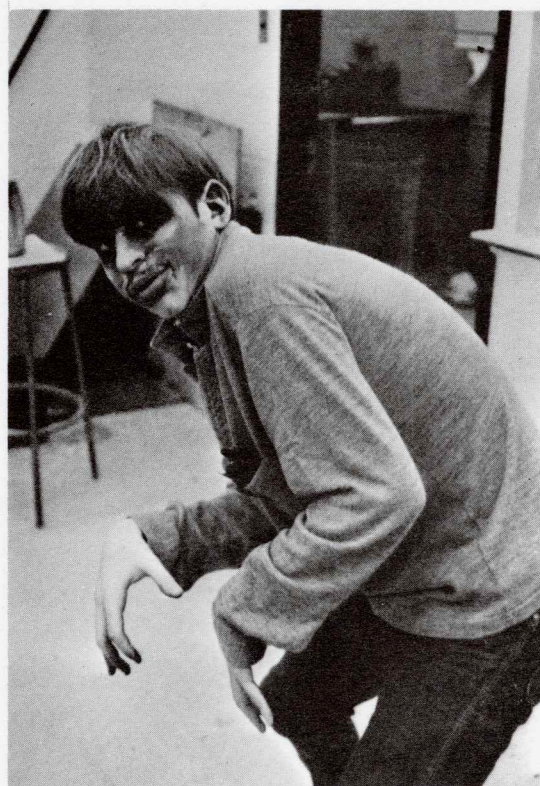
MULTIPLE FACES

Ages 15 – 17

Harold Pearce, M.A., Art Education, S.G.W.U.

New learning possibilities may be opened up through the exploration of sensory experiences which involve students in more than a visual, aural and intellectual way, but in ways which include other senses as well. Visual experiences that are integrated with an individual's experiences of touch and body movements tend to evoke a high degree of personal involvement and commitment. Sensory experience is vital to aesthetic experience. Aesthetics, considered in terms of experience, implies that beauty is not some kind of internal or external state, but a dynamic quality in our changing and developing responses and responsiveness to our environment. Varied sensory experiences increase the individual's personal contact with the possibilities of what lies before him — possibilities for his own enjoyment, to use and share through creative construction. Each student is encouraged to reach out, take, and work with aesthetic and sensory experiences towards the invention of new forms.

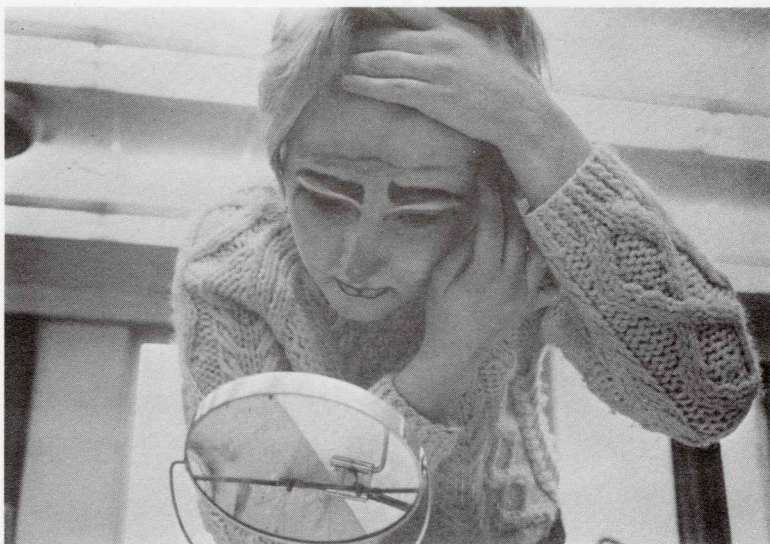
Can you change
what you think
a shoe can be used for?
Maybe a shoe
could change into
a hammer
a boat
a telephone.
What changes
can be found
for a magnifying glass
a paint brush
a face?





A face
how can it change?
When you put
make-up
on a face
it changes
that face.

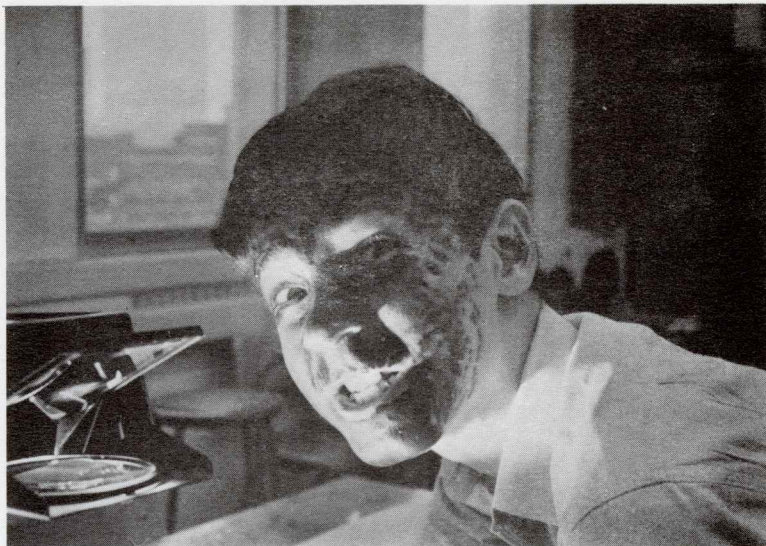
(Could you make up paint as face
on a face? What does a face
look like with a mouth on its
forehead or an eye on its chin?).



Your face
if you paint
each line or colour
makes a change
makes a new face
makes a painting
a transformation
and a transformation
a painting.



You are making
a self-portrait
of yourself
which really
isn't yourself.



You are making
an image
which changes
your self-image.



You suddenly **feel**
what a painting
must feel like
what paper must
feel like as its
surface is touched
is changing
as you paint
on the paper
a self-portrait
as large or larger
than yourself
and allow
that self-portrait
to grow
and change.



CHILD DRAMA – CHILD ART

Ages 4–6

Lonnie Echenberg, Undergraduate, B.F.A., S.G.W.U.,

Participatory drama for children is concerned with the total development of the child – the exercise of senses and imagination in learning about himself, his immediate environment, and the world he inhabits.

To explore the use of child drama in an art class setting, we discussed with the children an imaginary trip to the jungle of a far off, very hot country to find a rare medicinal herb. What supplies would we need? How should we be dressed? When we arrived what kind of country would we find? After much talk and growing excitement, we proceeded on our “trip”. We created an environment by placing around the room the collaged boxes from a previous lesson, and other large objects, so that the class could wend their way in and out amongst them. Each child covered his head with a cloth, and some draped fabrics around their bodies as well (fig.1). A rock record was put on very loud, the lights were put out – only the overhead projector was on – so a heightened mood was created.

The project was a great exercise for the imagination as the children acted out real encounters with fierce animals, the crossing of dangerous swamps, mountains, ravines. One child feigned illness, and had the rest of the group busy looking after him, keeping him warm, securing food and drink. In other words each child assumed a role and explored sensorially and emotionally what it is like to be another person, in another place, and doing something which, ordinarily, he would never experience.

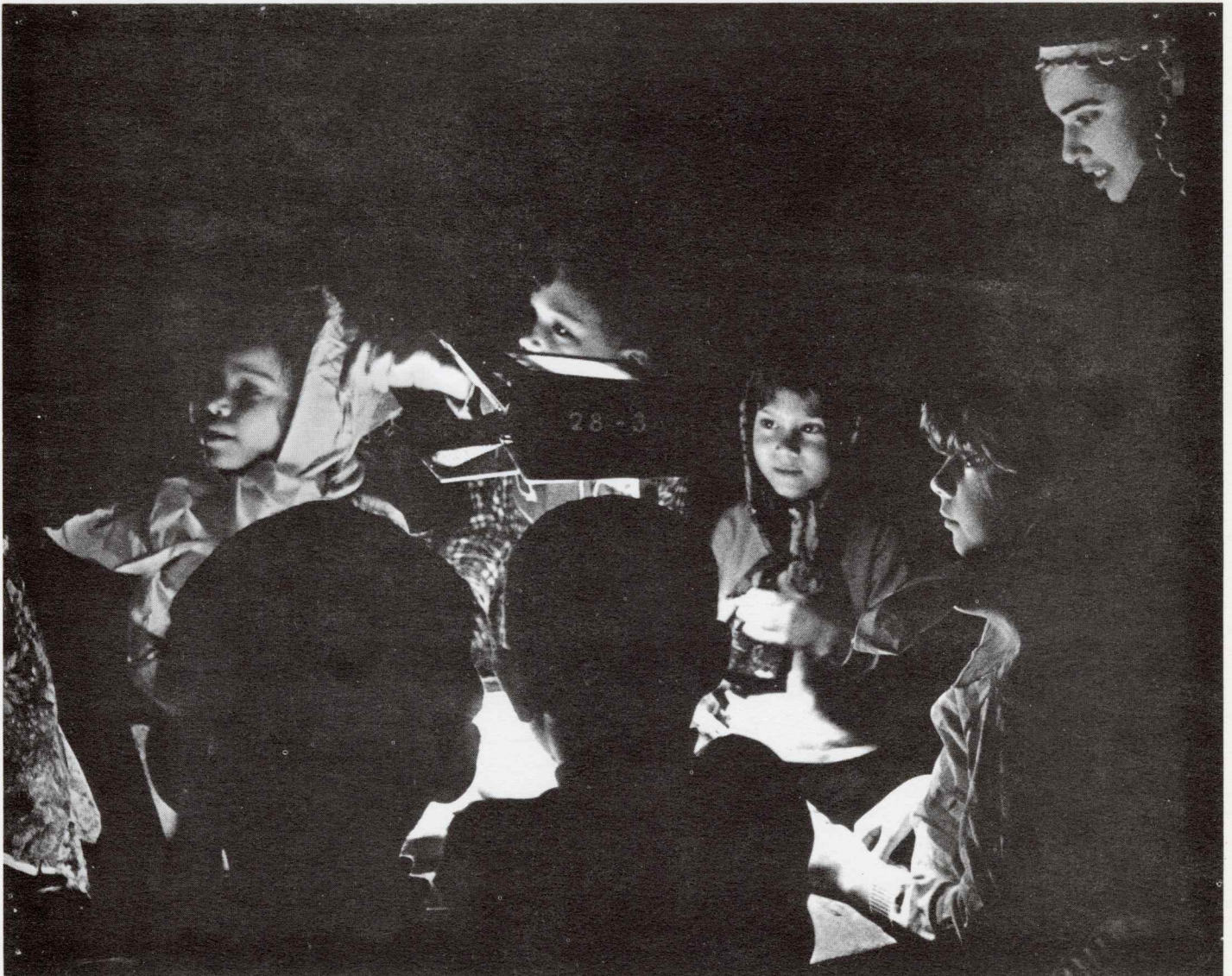
When it was felt that the “acting out” phase was complete, the class was asked to **draw** about their experiences – what they saw and how they felt – and then to place their drawings under the overhead projector. In a most remarkable way the children shifted from phantasy to reality without a hitch; they shifted from one unrelated medium to another with great ease and naturalness; they shifted from group activity to individual activity with no questions asked (fig. 2).

Our concern was primarily with process rather than with product and, in terms of process, this approach really “turned the children on” for undoubtedly their involvement in the improvised drama was intense, calling upon them to use all their senses to a heightened degree, and in turn translating these peak experiences into another medium.



FIG. 1

FIG. 2



AUDIO – VISUAL PRESENTATION

Ages 10 – 12

Doreen Lindsay Szilasi, M.A., Art Education, S.G.W.U.

The art class should provide an environment which allows for a balance between the freedoms necessary for the development of creativity, and the dissemination of technical information necessary for the application of this force. In providing for creative development, it should be understood that **meaningful** creation demands both material for the imagination to feed on and techniques for transforming that material into realized form. Creativity cannot occur in a vacuum; it must be supported by areas of knowledge and methods of handling this knowledge.

The audio-visual presentation described here is the culminating experience of a ten week series of classes engaged in by ten to twelve year olds. During this period each student was personally involved with the aesthetic problems inherent in the development of his own work and, through discussion, came to understand better the intrinsic art qualities in the work of mature artists. Each member of the class became more aware of the variety of aesthetic meanings in his own personal and social life. In total, the project attempted to deal with the student as an artist-in-training, to have him deal with and discuss the concerns of today's art.

Of the basic elements employed by the artist, colour was selected as the operating force around which all ten sessions radiated.

Broken down into its various components, the programme consisted of:

A. A hand drawn 16mm film which depicted various hues in flux.

Here colour, alive and moving, became the theme. Each student had three minutes of clear leader to work out for himself, which he did by using coloured inks and magic markers. He became aware of film – the number of frames per second, the movement from one frame to the next; he examined existing animated films, frame by frame. The students viewed their own hand painted films and, as well, the films of professional animators.

B. 35mm coloured slides were made without the use of a camera.

On the surface of small sheets of thin acetate the students scratched and drew, glued with coloured tissue papers, stained with coloured inks, and then heat-sealed the acetate into 35mm cardboard slide mounts.

C. A taped session

A tape was made during which word association and sound imagery of various colours were explored.



FIG. 1

D. 3—dimensional transparent sculptures

With the use of light sticks of wood and coloured celophane the students made quite large see-through forms which stood, or were used as mobiles.

E. 2—dimensional paintings of complementary colours.

F. Overhead projection and body movement.

Various oils, food-dyes and coloured tissues were put into plastic bags and projected onto a screen by an overhead projector. The artists-in-training became the colour themselves as they moved and turned in the coloured light.

After the above-mentioned projects had been explored and experienced separately, they were brought together to provide a multi-media environment in which the students became an active part: They provided movement (dance) on which to project their own colour experiments; the tape (audio) was played; their films and slides were projected by the students; both sculpture and paintings were displayed (fig. 1, 2, 3).

As complete a colour environment as possible was provided by and experienced by the entire class. Both knowledge and methods of handling that knowledge were present to produce the realized forms.

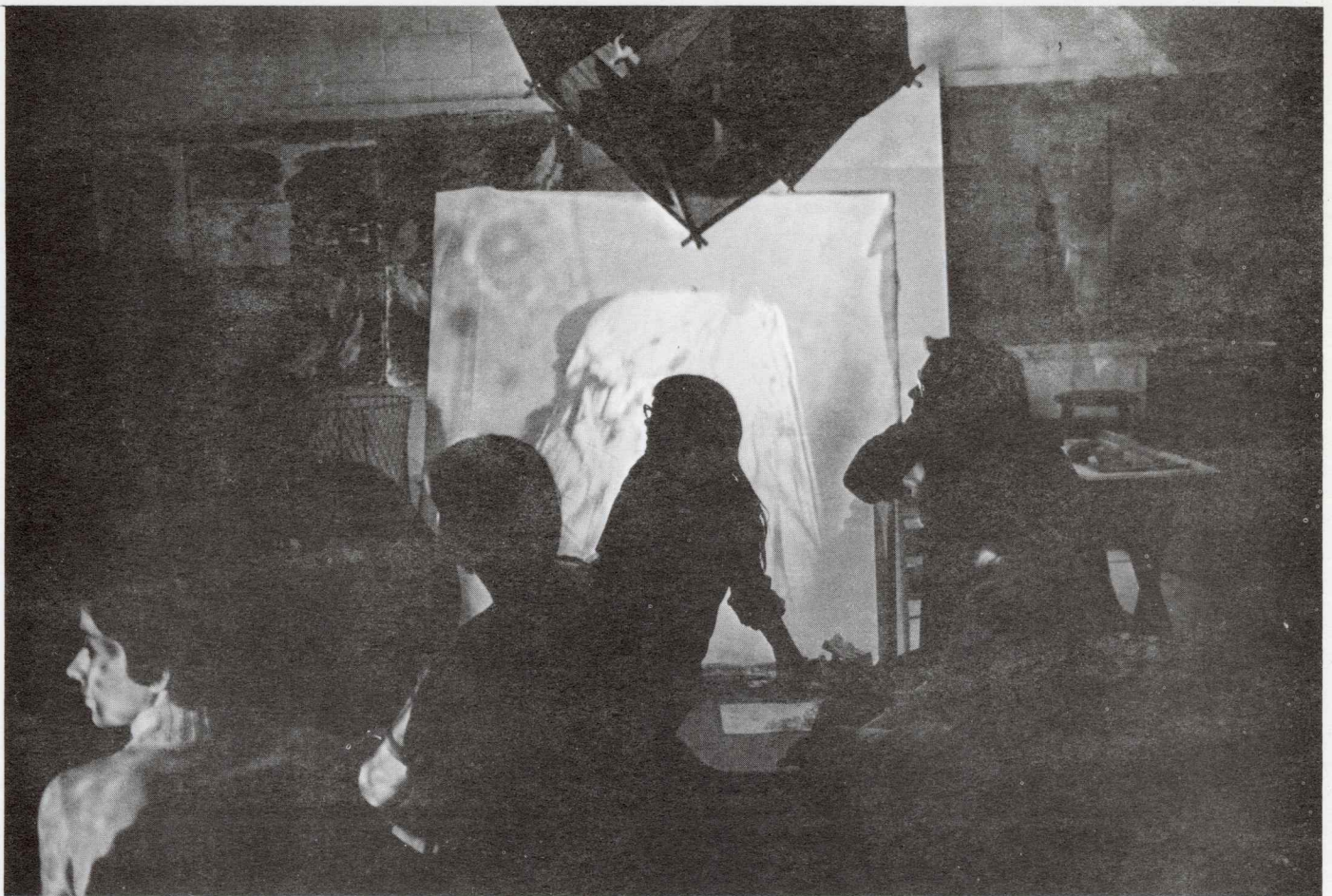


FIG. 2

FIG. 3



CHILDREN'S WORKSHOP
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

Assistant Professor Stanley Horner
 Department of Fine Arts
 Sir George Williams University

The report of the children's workshop (**Art, Children, and Media**) that was held at the National Gallery, summer 1968, was an attempt to set down a sort of basis for future questions and answers, an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and actual children using actual media. The report did not conclude with specific proposals; the implications are still too multiple to present any sort of detail in this short space. However, one overview statement might serve to bring the report towards a more pointed and relevant concern at this time.

Primary media¹ (paint, etc.) and primary schemata² (the metaphoric or subjective truth) pre-suppose an immediacy and directness that is in contrast to the detachment and distance inherent in secondary media¹ (T.V., etc.) and secondary schemata² (the documentary or optical truth).

Secondary media, being the second set of outward-reaching extensions of man to evolve, are now beginning to show their effects upon the masses³. Secondary media keep their artists in remote control. Herein lies the power of either the media or the man. Micro effort, symbolized by the push button, can yield macro effect, symbolized perhaps by the mushroom. The distance-factor, i.e. the remote control and the delayed or relayed feedback, gives man power with precision. Learning to manipulate the technology involves "playing" with it to see what happens; the feedback has to be pre-controlled so as not to boomerang back and blow up the sender in a mushroom. In other words there has to be a higher critical frame that will keep the manipulation-of-media level from getting stuck and letting the media run away with the power and becoming its own message, as well as a higher critical frame that will keep the man from running away with his power and becoming his own message. The exaggerated transformation of electronic media (2" x 2" slides equals a giant wall of light-image, or less equals more, plus) — all this has the grandeur of presence that at least initially overtakes the perception. If audiences accept uncritically, they will be seduced by the media; if they remain only critical they will never experience it. The conclusion: either alone seems to add up to a negative value.

1. Kepes G. Vision and Value Series, *Sign, Image and Symbol*. Braziller, 1965-66, pages 94-5.
2. Wolfflin, H. *Principles of Art History*, Dover, 1950.
3. McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media*, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

* It must be kept in mind that the following two reports represent only a partial picture of the children's workshop as it consisted altogether of six groups. The classes were organized so that each of the six teachers had a group of approximately 15 younger children (7–10 years) each morning, and another of similar size but older (11–14 years) in the afternoon. The programme lasted two weeks.

The teachers planned their own programmes based on an exploration of the nature of sequence relative to secondary media, (as a theme). No converging of ideas was encouraged; but rather each teacher came without interference in order to allow for unique or unheard of dimensions. Unfortunately limited space does not allow for the critical point of view of each of the six classes, but the reports of Miss Dupont and Mrs. Bhureau will point up certain sequences in order to arrive at some constructs for future efforts.

Stanley Horner.

THE TOTAL APPROACH WAS MULTIPLE

Ages 11 – 14

Chantel Dupont, M.A., Art Education, S.G.W.U.

The starting point for this age group was "sequence in film animation and dramatization of the body".

By using dramatic body gestures, the children exaggerated and underlined the movement, direction, force, shape and line of the paintings and sculptures of the gallery. These actions were photographed by the children themselves (fig. 1, 2).

The expression and dramatization of body parts was explored further during the film animation session. The face make-up, — a mask-extension of the nose and mouth; the hands, the whole body, clothing, — an extension of the skin.

At all times filming was preceded or followed by a graphic expression. For example: Make-up on their faces, creating a design, was followed by filming the dramatization of their faces; later, they painted self-portraits in order to capture a specific, personal facial expression; the filming of hands was followed by the drawing of hands in action.

The total approach was multiple, shifts would occur constantly; shift of media, shift of roles, shift of activities, shift from individual to collective work.

SHIFT OF MEDIA

The children worked easily with primary media such as theatrical make-up for mask making. Its use was direct and the end product was immediate (fig. 3). In a short time they shifted to secondary media, film, and its result was projected later.

Shifts also occurred from pantomime to photography, from film-making to painting and drawing, from creating of an object in papier maché to animation with film.

SHIFT OF ROLES

Each child had the possibility to choose his part in the teamwork necessary for film animation, and was free to accept any change that would enable him to explore different aspects of the work from cameraman to director, actor, animator of objects, and so on.

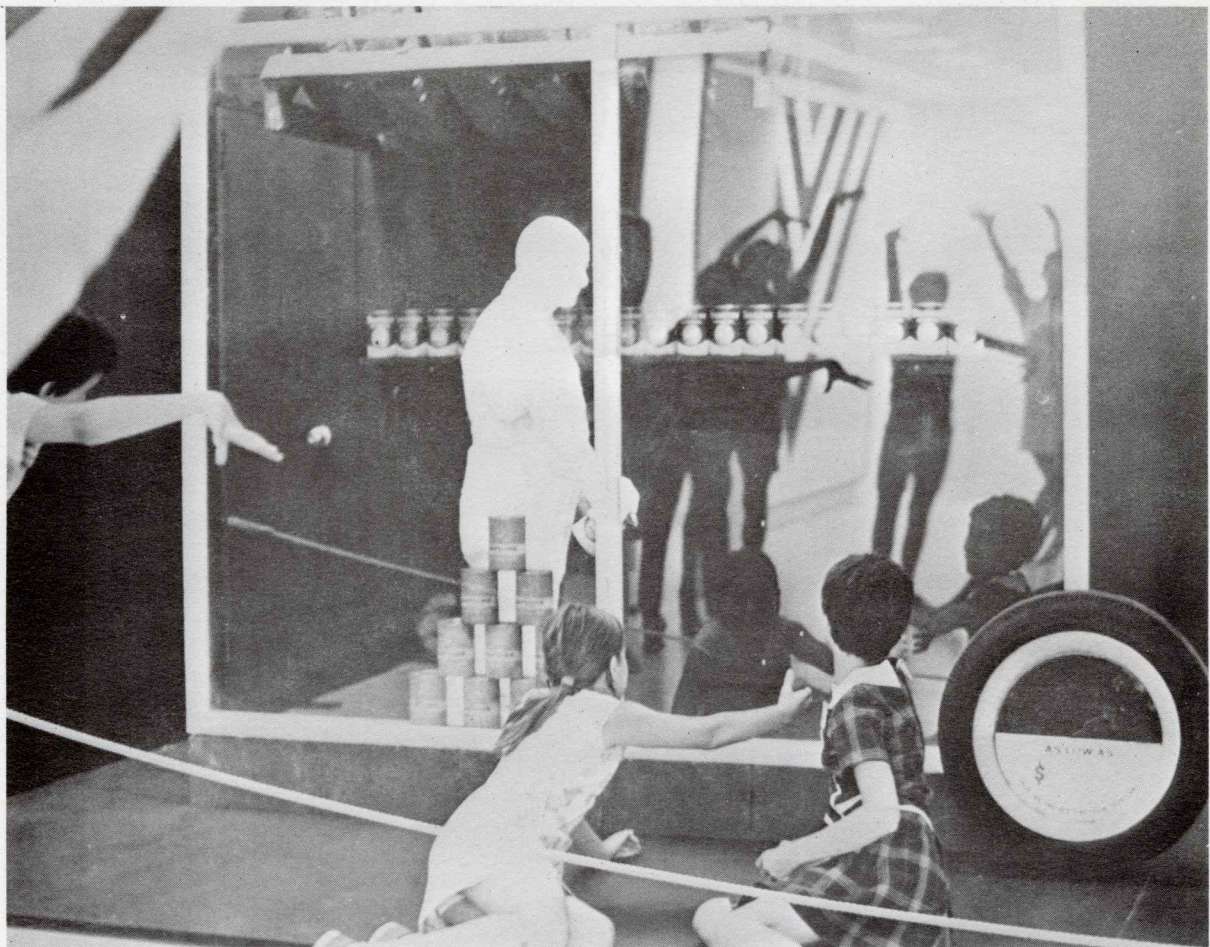


FIG. 1

FIG. 2

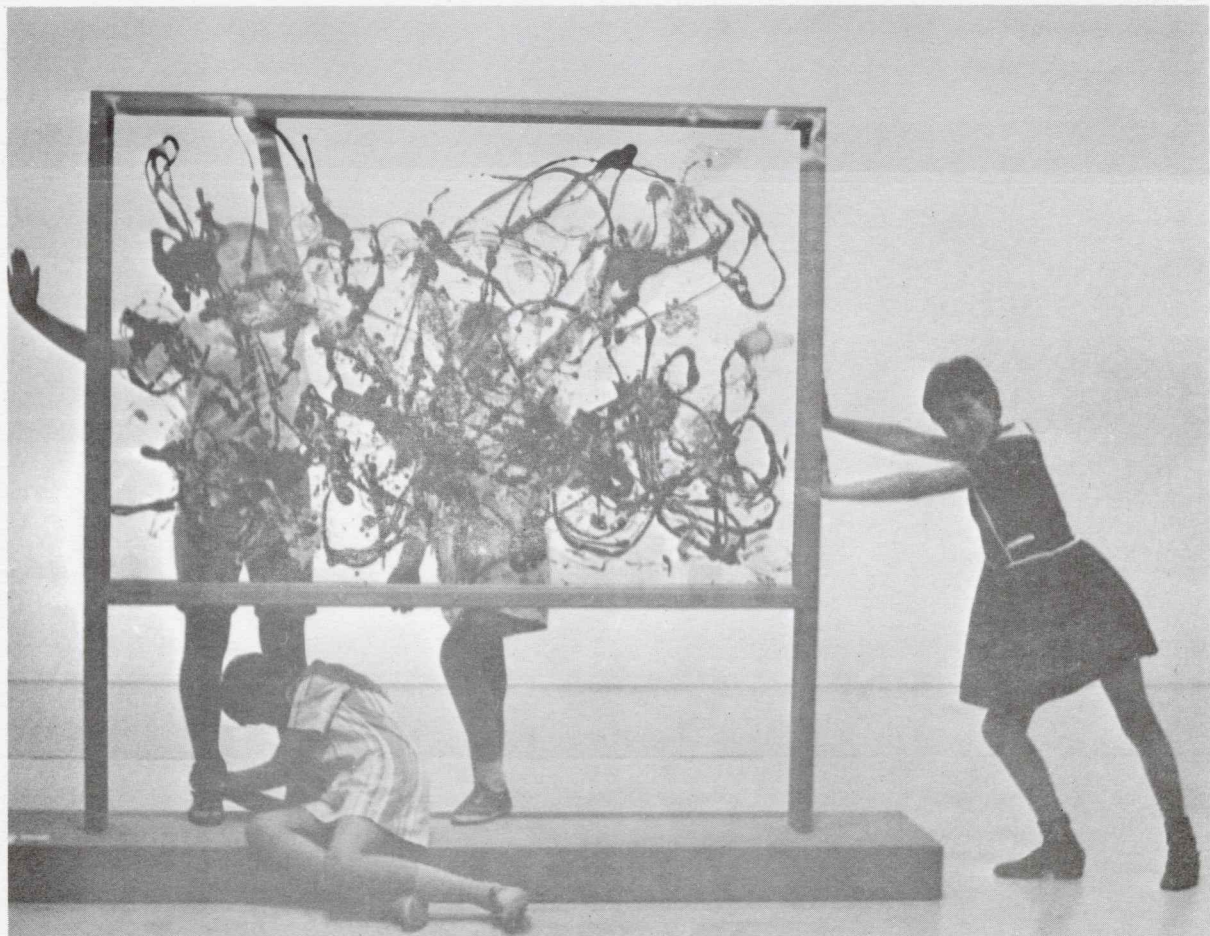




FIG. 3

At one time one member of the team who refused to participate in the making of masks was finally elected the photographic reporter of the whole experience.

The changing and sharing of roles was very important for the process towards their final product, the FILM.

They all depended on each other.

Where was the HAPPENING?

The child filming, or the actors improvising, or the object being animated? Simultaneous and different processes evolved towards a collective product.

SHIFT OF ACTIVITIES

Physical changes took place at all times for there were walks in the gallery, work in the studio, films made outside, and the projection of films as motivation. For the latter purpose the film "Very Nice, Very Nice" was shown in relation to the expression of faces and people, and Norman McLaren's films "Two Bagatelles" and "Dots" were shown in relation to technique.

In a two hour period a child could move in many different activities that would converge to the same interest.

SHIFT FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE WORK

This transfer was very important and frequent as the child was given the freedom to express his feelings through painting, drawing and pantomime, and at the same time was participating in a collective project, the film.

CONCLUSION

Excitement, discovery of new situations and new environments, curiosity of new media led the children towards unforgettable experiences not only for them, but for me, also.

DIARY – 5 GALLERY DAYS

Ages 7 – 10, 11 – 14.

Astrid Bhreur, M.A., Art Education, in progress, S.G.W.U.

The theme submitted to the two groups was space. Because of its multi-dimensional aspects, it englobes every day notions readily accessible to the child.

The aim of this project was to transfer these notions into emotions which could then be channeled into creativity.

THE FIRST DAY

Each day stood for a year. On the first day we talked about the movements and feelings of the sailor aboard his ship. We also discussed the training of the astronauts and their positions and directions in space. The children then took these positions and shot pictures of each other against a plain white background to simulate weightlessness of outer space. They also photographed themselves as they "acted out" with dramatic body gestures the dynamic movement, shape and line of the paintings and sculptures of the gallery (fig. 1).

At first they were intimidated by the new media but soon their enthusiasm took over; it was up to them to frame their pictures.

Their search into the world of photography led them to the discovery of close-up group photos and portraiture. They even studied details of clothing, and parts of their bodies.

They experienced the satisfaction of collective work!

THE SECOND DAY

This day was devoted to the colours of their environment. For motivation the children were taken to a museum, and later were shown a film on colour. Then they were invited to create their own colours which were made by drawing directly onto acetate slides using coloured felt markers. The children were very impressed and participated eagerly. They worked in two stages: 1—creation. 2—screening. During screening the children sat in two parallel rows between the projector and the screen. Thus, they experimented with the interference caused by their bodies between the light source and the screen.

A parallel was drawn between the slide screen and the electronic screen used by the scientist to navigate in space. At this point there existed a transfer between the tools, the means, and space.

Then the class proceeded to study the projector itself, the focus control and the rhythmic slide changer. Now enriched by this technical knowledge, the children discovered new textures by projecting their slides on the ceiling, the floor, and finally on their own bodies.



FIG. 1

THE THIRD DAY

On the third day the children were led to explore the screen. They started by making shadows on it with their hands and bodies. They experimented with reflections on sunglasses, window-panes and jewellery.

The next phase was devoted to modifying the screen itself. Shapes and colours were added to the blank surface in order to give it further dimensions (fig. 3).

THE FOURTH DAY

Texture was the main theme of the fourth day. I had asked the children to bring household products which could be mounted on acetate slides. They brought fabrics, and even sugar, salt, pepper and coconut. The class was greatly impressed by the fact that such well-known objects modified their appearance almost beyond recognition when blown up to screen size. Not only size, but even texture was different when visualized as transparencies. Furthermore, they noticed that the slides were tri-dimensional. By superimposing them with the pictures of the first day, they succeeded in creating the effect of weightlessness.



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

THE FIFTH DAY

On the last day, the emphasis was on movement in space. After seeing the film "Mouvement dans le Ciel" and "Panta Rhei", the children proceeded to build mobiles which they hung in front of the screen at different levels (fig. 2, 4). The final result was total participation in the form of team work. Each one had his job; each spectator became a performer.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the experience, both groups of children expressed themselves mostly by searching for nonconventional uses of the tools at hand. The automatic slide changer and focus control, and the uses to which they were put, are typical examples of this kind of discovery. This quest for new situations, new directions, contrasts sharply with the rigid, nonquestioning methods, and the stifling of natural inquisitiveness so often encountered at home and at school.